DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 303 SO 021 261

TITLE America's Role in the Middle East: A Curriculum Unit on America's Choices.

INSTITUTION Brown Univ., Providence, RI. Center for Foreign Policy Development.; Topsfield Foundation, Pomfret, CT. Study Circles Resource Center.

PUB DATE 91

NOTE 25p.

PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Current Events; Foreign Countries; *Foreign Policy; Futures (of Society); *International Relations; International Studies; *Political Issues; Secondary Education; Social Studies; World Affairs

IDENTIFIERS *Gulf War; Iraq; *Middle East

ABSTRACT

This curriculum unit uses the U.S. policy options in the Middle East following the Persian Gulf War as the focal point for discussing present and future policy goals. The range of views presented about postwar policy in the Middle East reflects differences in underlying beliefs about the proper role of the United States in the world and about the suitable conduct of U.S. policy in the Persian Gulf region. The four options presented are: (1) the U.S. as a regional superpower; (2) the U.S. creates a military balance of power in the region; (3) the U.S. promotes regional and global cooperation on Middle East security; and (4) the U.S. minimizes its role in the Middle East. The four options are intended to provide a starting point for discussing and thinking with others about some of the choices that the nation will have to make in the future. A sample lesson plan is included as well as worksheet activities. The materials are designed for high school social studies classes such as global studies or civics. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED336303

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A Curriculum Unit on America's Choices

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

SUSAN GRASECK

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A project of:
The Choices Education Project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
in cooperation with
The Study Circles Resource Center of the Topsfield Foundation

SO 021 241

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A Curriculum Unit on America's Choices

Four Options: A Framework for Discussion

On January 16, the United States and its allies went to war against Iraq. Although there were dissenting voices among the public, most Americans supported the President's decision to use force. Yet there has been no consensus on what long-term goals the U.S. should try to achieve in the region.

America's Role in the Middle East uses U.S. postwar policy options as the focal point for discussing present and future policy goals. The range of views about postwar policy in the Middle East reflects differences in underlying beliefs about the proper role of the U.S. in the world and about the suitable conduct of U.S. policy in the Gulf region.

Looking into the future always entails unknowns. We have been fighting a war in a complex region of the world during a transitional time in world politics. Some think that the result of the American and allied victory will be a backlash of Arab hostility toward the U.S., an enhancement of Muslim fundamentalism, and instability of moderate Arab governments. Others predict greater credibility for the U.S. within the region and greater stature for moderate Arabs. All agree that, though it is impossible to predict what will happen, we still need to think about what we as a nation want to accomplish.

The four options presented in this unit are distinct from each other in important ways; together they span a broad spectrum of feasible choices. They provide a starting point for discussing and thinking aloud with others about some of the choices that we as a nation will have to make. There are many possible approaches that the U.S. could take in the Middle East, some of them more likely than others. U.S. policy will evolve over time, as our elected officials make a series of decisions that will shape our policy direction. At this crucial time, we need to talk with our fellow citizens about what direction we want this policy to take. We need to look ahead so that we can have some input into this policy as it is being determined.

Each option takes the U.S. perspective, since that is the policy we have the responsibility and the means to affect. This does not mean that the U.S. will have complete freedom of action in the region after the war, or that it will be the only player with postwar plans. The actions of other countries will affect the range of choices that we have.

In considering these options, feel comfortable "trying them on" with others. You will find that each has risks and trade-offs. Think about your own concerns and goals. Listen to the views of others. Then come to your own considered judgment on this issue. By discussing these options you will contribute to a public discussion that is both interesting and historically important. If you find yourself feeling strongly that the U.S. should follow a certain policy, we encourage you to let your elected officials know.

A project of:
The Choices Education Project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
in cooperation with
The Study Circles Resource Center of the Topsfield Foundation

America's Role in the Middle East: The Options in Brief

OPTION 1: U.S. AS REGIONAL SUPERPOWER

After the war and for the foreseeable future, the U.S. should take the primary responsibility to guarantee order and stability in the Middle East. This will be part of our role as protector of a new world order in which aggression is no longer tolerated. Maintaining stability in this area of the world is particularly important, since the health of the world economy depends on continued access to Persian Gulf oil at reasonable prices. The U.S. is the only power with the military means to enforce this kind of order. In the immediate postwar period we will need to keep a strong military presence in the region. Since this option requires maintaining a readiness to use military force in the Middle East, we will need to sustain a military presence there over the long term as well, possibly one that includes ground troops.

OPTION 2: U.S. CREATES A MILITARY BALANCE OF POWER IN THE REGION

We should work to establish a regional military balance of power, in which no one nation can become powerful enough to dominate the region. By supplying arms or working with others to control arms supplies to the region, we would help to establish a rough equality of military force among the militarily powerful nations of the region. Each militarily weak nation should be allied with one of the stronger regional powers. With the Middle East in this balance, no one country will be tempted to launch an attack against another. Because this balance will be internal to the region, the U.S. should not have to be part of the balancing act with its own military. This approach will require a small U.S. military presence in the region in the immediate postwar period. In the longer term, achieving this kind of balance could involve arms control efforts to maintain the balance with weapons at lower levels, but this is not a prerequisite to this approach.

OPTION 3: U.S. PROMOTES REGIONAL & GLOBAL COOPERATION ON MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

We should work to establish regional and international cooperation concerning Middle East security. This strategy will need strong U.S. support, but its success will require the leadership of regional and international organizations. The U.S. should use its current influence with Israel and with Arab states to secure cooperation among the nations of the region. Collaboration on military security concerns could be carried out through strengthening already existing organizations (such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council), and through limiting arms shipments to the region through international agreements. Because of the security implications of the Palestinian question, the U.S. should encourage moves toward an Arab-Israeli dialogue. In the immediate postwar period the U.S. should encourage the United Nations and/or a pan-Arab group to establish a peace-keeping force in the region. Over time, this approach could lead to cooperation in addressing the underlying conflicts that lead to war (such as economic, social, and human rights issues).

OPTION 4: U.S. MINIMIZES ITS ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We should reduce our military presence in the Middle East and begin to concentrate on our pressing economic and social problems on the home front. We don't have the resources both to look after ourselves as we should and to make extensive commitments around the globe. Our security guarantee to Israel is one such commitment. We should encourage Israel to find its own security solutions. We need to make sure that any future commitment of our military forces is for the purpose of protecting our direct national interests. In the immediate postwar period, we should scale down our military presence to the minimum necessary to provide physical defense of oil facilities and shipping lanes. To reach the long-term goal of minimizing our role, we should work on energy independence in order to make our intervention in Middle East politics less necessary.

A project of:
The Choices Education Project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
in cooperation with
The Study Circles Resource Center of the Topsfield Foundation

Sample Lesson Plan

Objective: The objective of this three-day unit is to look at the current situation in the Persian Gulf, to consider what policy directions are feasible for the United States, and to come to a judgment about the most appropriate direction for U.S. policy in the future.

Overview

Day 1

Introduction to the topic	10 min
Consideration of the threats in the region	10 min
Introduction to the Options	25 min
Homework worksheet	

Day 2

Consideration of goals of U.S. policy in the region	15 min
Discussion of the Options presented	30 min
Homework	

(Current Problems in the Middle East: A Brief History; Policy Choices)

Day 3:

Ranking the Options	15min
Discussion of preferred option	30 min
Homework	

Day 1:

Introduction to the topic (10 min)

Ask students to think back to the night of January 16th when they first heard that war had broken out in the Persian Gulf. What were their feelings at the time? Did they support the President's decision? Had they been following the situation prior to this? In the days leading up to the final decision, what had they thought we should do? (We suggest these questions as a way to have students reflect on changes in their own attitudes or opinions.)

Consideration of the threats in the region (10 min)

Brainstorm what the images are of the Middle East. Then ask them what the leading threats are to the United States, recording ideas on a blackboard. Examples are included on the worksheet (Risk section).

Introduction to the Options (25 min)

Divide the class into four groups. Assign each one of the Options, giving them only the title sentence (on the blackboard) and ask them in their groups (or individually) to write a paragraph supporting their assigned option. Questions they could address include: What is the threat that we need to deal with? What goals are we trying to achieve? What will the price of this option be? (The purpose of this is to get the students thinking about the topic so that when they get the options materials, they will have a context.)

Homework (worksheet)

Give students a copy of the worksheet to fill out for homework. By doing this, students will be asking themselves what risks they are particularly concerned about—either because they are so serious or because they are so likely to occur—and what risks are of less concern to them. These worksheets serve as a starting point for consideration of the policy options on day 2.

Day 2:

Consideration of goals for U.S. policy in the Middle East (15 min)

There is considerable disagreement about what our goals should be in the Middle East following the war. Ask the students what goals they support. Have them justify their responses. A list of possible goals is included on the worksheet (Goals section).

Discussion of the Options presented (30 min)

The purpose of the options framework is to lay out in succinct form a menu of feasible policy options. These options are derived from divergent assumptions about the role of the U.S. in the world, about the nature of Middle East security, and about the goals we want to set.

Hand out the Introduction to the Framework and the one-page overview of the options. (The four-page section that includes one option per page is optional but will be particularly useful to your students if you plan to give them a written assignment at the close of the unit.)

Break the students up into groups of 3-5. Ask them to generate a list of the things they like about each of the options. Then ask for a list of the things they dislike about each. Ask the students to keep in mind the threats they are concerned about and the goals they support. (We suggest they list at least two things they like and two things they dislike about each Option.)

Homework (Current Problems in the Middle East: A Brief History; Policy Choices)

Give the students copies of the background material and a copy "Policy Choices". They should read the background material, consider the options discussed in class, and then use the Policy Choices sheet to rank these (1-4) taking into account the trade-offs inherent in each. Ask your students to be ready to make a case for their chosen policy choice in the next class. Choosing a policy option serves to culminate the discussion of these four options before going on to the students' preferred options.

We have the students consider the Options before getting the background material. We have found found that using a choices approach, students can productively discuss an issue for at least one class period before they need more factual material. Once they have the need for more and have a context in which to place it, they can absorb it better and use it more fruitfully.)

Day 3:

Ranking the Options (15 min)

Poll the students on their responses to the policy options, recording the results on the blackboard. Then ask some of the students to make a case to the class for the Options they chose. This will be a culmination of the consideration of the four Options described and serve as a springboard to discussion of the students perferred Options.

Discussion of preferred Options (30 min)

Using the list of underlying beliefs (worksheet) as a guide, ask the students what sort of policy they think we should follow. This may be one of the four options or a new option five (possibly a combination of those presented). You are looking for areas of consensus or common ground within the group. However, you also want to encourage respect for areas of difference. We suggest you write down the points on which students agree and those on which they do not agree.

Homework (preferred Options - letter)

Ask students to craft a description of their own preferred Option five or to explain their support of one of the four options described. (This could be done as a letter to their Senators and Representative or a letter to the editor of their local paper.)

WORKSHEET

I. Underlying beliefs: What do you think of the following statements? Rate each of these:

1 = Strongly support
2 = Support
3 = Oppose
4 = Strongly oppose
5 = Uncertain

___ The U.S. has an obligation to take a leadership role to prevent and redress aggression and to protect vital resources such as oil for the world market.

___ The U.S. has enough problems at home. We do not belong half way around the world intervening in the affairs of nations who do not welcome us and whose culture we understand little about.

___ The world order is changing. With East and West no longer in a standoff, it is possible for the U.N. to assume its intended peacekeeping and conflict resolution role. The U.S. should use its new clout resulting from the war to promote the U.N. as the world's central peacekeeping body.

___ Conflicts between countries or peoples in the Middle East should be left to the countries involved to settle.

___ We must never again let one player in the region become a regional superpower, able to take over another state, threaten Israel and others, or threaten to control so much oil that he can dictate its price to the world.

___ Other nations besides the U.S. stand to gain from ensuring regional stability. They should help pay the price.

II. Future Risks

Following the war in the Gulf, what do you think will be the main threats to peace in the Middle East? Rate each of the following as follows:

The consequences are:
1 = Severe
2 = Serious
3 = Somewhat serious
4 = Minor

This scenario is:
A = Highly likely
B = Somewhat likely
C = Not very likely
D = Remote

___ ___ Inequality among rich and poor Arab states could lead to more inter-Arab conflicts which could lead to another war.

___ ___ A region-wide build-up of both conventional and unconventional (eg. biological, chemical, and nuclear) weapons could continue, causing even more distrust and mutual fear among countries and greatly threatening the lives of people in the area.

___ ___ The on-going dispute between Israelis and Palestinians could erupt into another war, perhaps embroiling other Arab states.

over

___ ___ If Saddam Hussein is deposed and Iraq is destroyed and then left unoccupied, Iraq may fall into civil war or its neighbors may begin fighting for its territory.

___ ___ A continued U.S. presence in the Gulf could inspire increased anti-Americanism throughout the Arab world and terrorist acts against Americans.

___ ___ If the U.S. leaves and no longer acts as peacekeeper, the region may fall into such chaos that even the U.N. cannot control it.

___ ___ If the U.S. remains in the Gulf, our economy and social programs at home will suffer more setbacks because we will be diverting resources needed at home.

III. Goals: What do you think of the following goals for U.S. policy following the war in the Middle East? Rate each of these:

1= Strongly support
2= Support
3= Oppose
4= Strongly oppose
5= Uncertain

___ Stop aggression in the region wherever it appears

___ Protect the long-term security of U.S. allies in the Arab world

___ Protect the long-term security of Israel

___ Remove the threat that any nation in the region could buy or develop chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons

___ Encourage the development of democratic governments in the region

___ Stop the spread of Islamic fundamentalism

___ Limit the transfer of arms to the region

___ Prevent conflicts within the region from erupting into war

___ Minimize the role of the American military in the region and refocus our attention at home

___ Avoid the complete disintegration of Iraq

___ Secure the flow of oil from the region at a reasonable price

___ Strengthen the U.N. and the international community's ability to resolve crises in the region

Policy Choices

What policy should the U.S. follow in the postwar Middle East?

Rank the following 1-4 with 1 the most desirable.

___ We should take the primary responsibility to guarantee order and stability in the Middle East, even if this means we need to maintain a large and expensive military presence which may fuel anti-American sentiment in the region.

___ We should help establish a regional military balance of power in the region, even if this requires a build-up of conventional arms in the region and sometimes means that we have to support unsavory dictators.

___ We should work to establish regional and international cooperation concerning Middle East security, even if it means we are giving away some of the military and political clout we developed as a result of the war in the Gulf.

___ We should reduce our military presence in the Middle East and begin to concentrate on pressing economic and social problems at home, even if this means that we have to back off from our security guarantee to Israel and cannot any longer guarantee the flow of oil from the region at reasonable prices.

OPTION 1: U.S. AS REGIONAL SUPERPOWER

After the war and for the foreseeable future, the U.S. should take the primary responsibility to guarantee order and stability in the Middle East. This will be part of our role as protector of a new world order in which aggression is no longer tolerated. Maintaining stability in this area of the world is particularly important, since the health of the world economy depends on continued access to Persian Gulf oil at reasonable prices. The U.S. is the only power with the military means to enforce this kind of order.

Near-term policies: In the immediate postwar period, the U.S. will have to keep a strong military presence in the region. This may require an occupation of Iraq similar to the victorious powers' occupation of Germany and Japan after World War II. A strong U.S. presence will prevent Middle Eastern nations with strong militaries (perhaps Syria and Iran) from taking advantage of the postwar power vacuum and staking their own claims.

Long-term policies: In order to guarantee stability in the region over the long term, a U.S. military presence will continue to be necessary. This could take the form of naval power and keeping weapons in the region (to enable our troops to go back in quickly if they are needed). It may also be necessary to keep some American ground troops there (much as we have kept ground troops in Korea since the Korean War). This kind of tangible presence in the region will be more effective than the policy that we followed in the 70s and 80s—trying to keep the region in balance through arms sales and aid.

Critics say:

- Over the long term, this will be very costly. Nations that have contributed financially during the war will not be likely to help pay the costs of our postwar involvement.
- A continued military presence will certainly fuel anti-American sentiment and work against our interests in the long run. The governments of the oil-rich countries could easily be toppled, and new regimes would threaten our access to reasonably priced oil supplies.
- A continued military presence will not be feasible because we may not be wanted there by most nations of the region. Even our friends in the Arab world do not want us to be so visible in the region because of the anti-American sentiment it would create among their populations.
- We cannot afford to police every region of the world in this way, and it would be hypocritical to say that we are standing against aggression when we police only the regions (like this one) in which we have great economic interest.
- Strong anti-Americanism in the region resulting from this choice will make it very hard to address long-standing regional conflicts.
- By taking the primary responsibility for keeping the region secure, we would be failing to capitalize on the new-found spirit of international cooperation and the new credibility and usefulness of the United Nations.
- It should not be the job of the U.S. to ensure the stability of a region so far away from home. We no longer have to worry about countering the Soviets in this region, and other concerns that draw us into the region (reasonably priced oil and the security of Israel) do not require our long-term military presence.

Supporters say:

- We will be more capable of ensuring continued access to reasonably priced oil, important for our and others' economic health.

- Our continued military presence will enhance our credibility in the world, since it signals that we remain committed to the security of the Middle East and to following through with our missions once we start them.
- We will fulfill our political and moral duty to maintain a world order in which aggression is not tolerated.
- We will be able to ensure the security of our long-time friends in the region (notably Israel and the oil-rich Arab states).
- Our strengthened role in the region will enable us to promote democracy and human rights in the region.

OPTION 2: U.S. CREATES A MILITARY BALANCE OF POWER IN THE REGION

We should work to establish a regional military balance of power, in which no one nation can become powerful enough to dominate the region. By supplying arms or working with others to control arms supplies to the region, we would help to establish a rough equality of military force among the militarily powerful nations of the region. Each militarily weak nation will be allied with one of the stronger regional powers. With the Middle East in this balance, no one country should be tempted to launch an attack against another. Because this balance will be internal to the region, the U.S. should not have to be part of the balancing act with its own military.

Near-term policies: This balance will require a small U.S. military presence in the region in the immediate postwar period. This will ensure that other countries in the region won't be tempted to take advantage of Iraq's postwar weakness by trying to take over as the dominant power in the Middle East. It will also give us influence in establishing the balance.

Long-term policies: In the longer term, a U.S. military presence will not be necessary. This balance among the militaries of the region could take one of two forms. If other countries of the world continue to sell and give arms to the nations of the Middle East, the U.S. should supply weapons to any nation or group of nations in the region that is becoming dangerously weak and tempting to aggressors. On the other hand, if other nations of the world agree to slow or stop arms shipments to this region, the U.S. should agree to this. However, restricting arms sales is not the main focus of this approach to security—keeping the balance is the key. Arms control is only one way to help establish a balance of power in the region at lower levels of arms. There should be one exception to our willingness to supply arms: we should insist on an international agreement not to sell components for unconventional (nuclear, biological, and chemical) weapons to this region, since such weapons are by their nature dangerous and destabilizing.

Critics say:

– We tried this in the 1970s and 1980s and it didn't work. This is a formula for an intense regional arms race. As each nation in the region sees its neighbors acquiring arms, it will demand more for itself—either from America or, if we refuse, from the many available suppliers.

– We overestimate our ability to "fine tune" a balance in the Middle East, a complicated region with a political and cultural history very different from our own.

– Some people, both in the region and everywhere, will think that it is contradictory that the U.S. supplies some kinds of arms gladly while trying at the same time to control or halt the supplies of other arms (nuclear, biological, and chemical). By appearing to endorse "weapons as the best way to keep the peace" we really encourage nations to acquire *all* types of weapons (even if we don't mean to).

– By making stability in the region our primary goal, we end up supporting unsavory dictators. This will make it less likely that we will be able to promote democracy within the region.

– By taking the primary responsibility for keeping the region secure, we fail to capitalize on the new-found spirit of international cooperation and the new credibility and usefulness of the United Nations.

– It should not be the job of the U.S. to ensure the stability of a region so far away from home. We no longer have to worry about countering the Soviets in this region, and other concerns that draw us into the region (reasonably priced oil and the security of Israel) are best dealt with in non-military ways.

– If the U.S. takes the responsibility to keep the region in balance, this will likely fuel anti-American sentiment and ultimately work against our interests.

– Trying to keep more than two nations "in balance" is a very difficult task because the balance can shift quickly and become unstable. This difficulty was evident when we failed to give proper attention to Iraq's growing military might before its invasion of Kuwait.

Supporters say:

- This is a realistic goal because it doesn't require cooperation among the nations of the region. Especially in a region with such deep conflicts, the only reason that nations will "stay in line" is the fear of being defeated on the battlefield.

- This is a realistic role for the U.S. to play because it doesn't require that we or the nations of Middle East address the long-standing and complicated conflicts there (like the Arab-Israeli disputes over the Palestinian question).

- This will require some economic commitment from the U.S. (especially in the form of military aid), but pursuing this policy wouldn't be nearly as costly in financial terms as maintaining a permanent military presence.

- This will enable us to ensure the security of our long-time friends in the region (notably Israel and the oil-rich Arab states). Because this option does not require the presence of large, highly visible American ground troops, it would not arouse great anti-Americanism among the local populations.

- Through skillful use of arms trading and diplomacy, we will be able to attain the same goals as with a permanent presence in the region, without having all the potential problems.

OPTION 3: U.S. PROMOTES REGIONAL & GLOBAL COOPERATION ON MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

We should work to establish regional and international cooperation concerning Middle East security. This strategy will need strong U.S. support, but its success will require the leadership of regional and international organizations. The U.S. should use its current influence with Israel and with Arab states to secure cooperation among the nations of the region. Collaboration on military security concerns could be carried out through strengthening already existing organizations (such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council), and through limiting arms shipments to the region through international agreements. Because of the security implications of the Palestinian question, the U.S. should encourage moves toward an Arab-Israeli dialogue. Over time, this approach could lead to cooperation in addressing the underlying conflicts that lead to war (such as economic, social, and human rights issues).

Near-term policies: In the immediate postwar period, the U.S. should encourage the United Nations and/or some pan-Arab group to establish a peacekeeping force in the region, at least in Kuwait and possibly elsewhere. The U.S. may want to keep some small military presence in the region as part of that force. However, in order to avoid antagonizing large segments of the Arab population, the makeup of the force should be truly multinational in character. In its initial postwar dealings in the region, the U.S. should make clear that it wants to encourage a truly regional approach to security that can be aided by the international community.

Long-term policies: Since conflicts in this region have spawned wars and threatened global security, there will be new incentives for cooperation on security issues. As the region experiences cooperation on military security, regional and international organizations will be better able to address the underlying causes of regional conflicts. Over the long term, the U.S. should encourage cooperation on non-military as well as military security aspects of regional conflicts. The two most important conflicts in the region are the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the division between oil-rich Arab nations and the poorer Arab nations of the region. The U.S. should take part as only one interested party in the international forums on such issues.

Critics say:

- By encouraging the leadership of regional and international organizations, we would be giving up our say in the region. We have gained the ability to speak for ourselves at great cost, and we should not give it away.

- By giving up so much of our voice to regional and international organizations, we cannot guarantee the protection of our own vital interests in the region.

- Any motivation for cooperation among the nations of the region that existed before the war started will be gone in the bitter postwar atmosphere. No international or regional organization will have the support or strength it would take to build a regional consensus or enforce cooperation.

- Encouraging consideration of the issues of wealth and poverty within the Arab world will not be feasible. The Gulf war has deepened the hostilities between the rich and poor Arab states.

- Encouraging any consideration of the Palestinian issue would likely lead to a situation that would threaten the security of Israel, our long-time friend and ally. Besides, the Gulf war has only widened the gap between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

- It will be difficult if not impossible to limit conventional arms shipments to this volatile region in which so many countries have an interest.

Supporters say:

- The United Nations has new clout in the world due to its role in standing against Iraqi aggression; encouraging it to play a role in the region would take advantage of this new-found capacity and further strengthen it to deal with other threats to global security as well.

- Taking this role in the region will enable us to champion a new world order in which respect for international law and cooperation (regional and global) in enforcing international law would help keep the peace. It is better that regional Arab organizations and the U.N. prevent aggression by making clear that they will not tolerate it than that the U.S. should take on this burden.

- By encouraging the world and the region to deal with the underlying conflicts in the Middle East, we will weaken the incentive to buy and sell arms as a way to gain security. It is in the interests of the United States that conflicts in the region be settled by means other than arms if possible; it is also in America's interest that any wars that do occur be less violent because of fewer arms in the region.

- Taking this role in the region will help the United States and all nations to collaborate on addressing the underlying issues that spawn conflict—such as economic, social, and human rights concerns. This approach would be consistent with our concern over Iraq's aggression toward Kuwait and would enhance our credibility in the world by making our foreign policy more consistent with our human rights concerns.

- This cooperative approach will minimize any American military commitments or involvements in the region, both in the near and long terms. The U.S. will not need to do more than back up U.N. and Arab security arrangements that will usually succeed by themselves.

OPTION 4: U.S. MINIMIZES ITS ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

We should reduce our military presence in the Middle East and begin to concentrate on our pressing economic and social problems on the home front. We don't have the resources both to look after ourselves as we should and to make extensive commitments around the globe. Our security guarantee to Israel is one such commitment. We should encourage Israel to find its own security solutions. We need to make sure that any future commitment of our military forces is for the purpose of protecting our direct national interests.

Near-term policies: In the immediate postwar period, we should scale down our military presence to the minimum necessary to provide physical defense of oil facilities and shipping lanes. Other issues regarding the region, such as whether to hold an international or regional conference on the Middle East, should be left up to the nations in the region that would be directly affected.

Long-term policies: To reach the long-term goal of minimizing our role, we should work to make our intervention in Middle East politics less necessary. While we could continue to sell arms to the Israelis and give them some military aid, we should let them know that we will not be able to come to their defense. On the oil issue, we should begin a national program for becoming as energy-independent as possible. Now that the Cold War is over, we no longer have the responsibility to protect oil supplies for Europe and Japan. In this changing world, they are our chief economic competitors.

Critics say:

- We are affected by other countries in the world even when we are not committed to formal alliances. To protect our own interests, we need to be involved around the world.
- Access to oil at reasonable prices would be in our interest even if the U.S. itself were completely energy-independent, since it affects the health of the world economy of which we are a part.
- As a great power with a large military and many resources, we would be shirking our responsibilities if we were not constructively involved with the rest of the world, especially in promoting democracy and helping to keep the peace.
- Our security guarantee to Israel represents a long-standing and important commitment and should not be dropped. The security of Israel, a friend and a democracy that is surrounded by enemies, is important to us.
- If we take a minimal role in the region, other nations of the world will take advantage of this power vacuum and advance their own interests at our expense.
- If we take a minimal role, we will give up our opportunity to promote international cooperation on a variety of global issues like this one.
- If the U.S. withdraws from involvement in the region it will be interpreted around the world as a sign of weakness. That would reinforce the growing notion that America is "in decline" by suggesting that we no longer are strong enough to carry burdens that we once carried easily.

Supporters say:

- This will enable us to take care of pressing economic, educational, housing, and health problems here in the U.S. by freeing our attention and budget from extraneous international commitments.
- This approach could open the way to the region beginning to solve its own problems. The Arabs especially often ask the West to leave them alone to find "Arab solutions to Arab problems."

- If we work to make ourselves less vulnerable to the Middle East, we will not have to go in with our military even if another war were to occur there. (Some say that our vital interests were not threatened even before the Gulf war, since whoever owns the oil will have to sell it at a reasonable price.)

- Now that the Cold War is over, the chances are greater that the region won't be subject to external meddling. We won't need to counteract Soviet influence, because the Soviets are much weaker and will be busy taking care of their own domestic situation.

- If we take this kind of approach to all the regions of the world, we can reduce our military forces (and budget) dramatically and receive a true peace dividend.

A project of:
The Choices Education Project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
in cooperation with
The Study Circles Resource Center of the Topsfield Foundation

Current Problems in the Middle East: A Brief History

Now that the war in the Persian Gulf has ended, Americans have an opportunity to consider the shape of the U.S. role in the Middle East for years to come. In order to reach a lasting peace, whatever role the United States chooses to play, certain long-standing issues in the region will persist and will need to be addressed. The following pages give a brief overview of the origins of some long-term threats to stability in the postwar Middle East.

Arab Frustration

First it is important to understand the view of the Arabs with and against whom we have been fighting. Throughout the Gulf war, Saddam Hussein urged other Arabs to protest what he viewed as U.S. attempts to dominate the Middle East. To a degree he was successful. Pictures of rioting Arabs burning U.S. flags often filled the U.S. news. Americans have long been targets of terrorist acts and hostage-takings in the Middle East. Why is there so much anti-Americanism in the Arab world?

Colonialism

After World War I, most parts of the Middle East were controlled politically by the British or the French. The colonial powers either ruled indirectly, by imposing their policies through cooperative local leaders, or directly by British or French-run governments. The Western rulers used this political control in part to gain access to Middle Eastern oil. They located petroleum reserves and made huge fortunes drilling them. Many Arabs resented the presence of foreigners who lived in luxury from the sale of local oil, while the native population, which did not receive much of the oil profits, remained very poor. Arabs also resented the Westerners' political control.

The United States, unlike Britain and France, never had formal control over any of the Middle Eastern countries. In fact, immediately following World War II, the U.S. sympathized with local citizens in their desire to run their own affairs. Soon, however, Americans began to worry that communists would come to power in the Middle East; therefore, the U.S. began to take a more active role in the region. In 1953 in Iran for example, the CIA helped the unpopular but anti-communist Shah (King) retain power and Americans helped train his secret police. People in the region condemned this Western intervention into domestic Middle Eastern politics. In addition, many Iranians, victims of the secret police, opposed the Shah and resented the United States for backing his government.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism, a return to traditional religious and cultural values, has become a powerful political force in the Middle East.

American economic and cultural influence across the globe has angered traditional Muslims who see the entire world, including many younger Muslims, adopting Western cultural and business practices at the expense of Eastern ones. In addition, the respect and envy some Muslims feel for the West increases the threat traditional Muslim leaders feel from the West. These more traditional Arabs' fundamentalist beliefs represent their desire to protect their world from Western cultural domination. Islam also represents a way for Arabs to fight the political corruption and economic over-dependence on U.S. aid that plagues many Arab regimes. Fundamentalist political candidates promising to fight these problems have won parliamentary posts in Jordan, Egypt, and Algeria.

A Project of:
The Choices Education Project of the Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
in cooperation with
The Study Circles Resource Center of Topsfield Foundation

During the reign of the last Shah, Iranians who were opposed the Shah and his Western backers were allowed little political expression of their views. As a result, many Iranians could only speak out in their mosques, and Islam became a powerful political force in Iran. In 1979, Islamic fundamentalists, led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, overthrew the Shah and came to power. Radicals in the new regime took over the U.S. embassy and held U.S. diplomats hostage for more than a year. Khomeini was popular among many people throughout the Muslim world for having turned the tables on Western forces, which had so long controlled Middle Eastern affairs.

Pan-Arabism

Some Arabs have also sought to overcome Western political manipulation by banding together. These pan-Arabists assert that the people of the region can best solve their own disputes and that states in the Middle East should govern themselves without outside intervention.

Arab leaders have found public support at home by calling for Arab independence from the West, as Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser did. He called on all Arabs to join him in a pan-Arab alliance which would not be dependent on Western powers. In 1956 he went as far as taking over the British-owned Suez Canal and enduring attacks by the British, French, and Israelis, so that Egyptians could profit from the waterway located in their country. Nasser succeeded in keeping the canal and became a great hero in the Arab world for opposing the West. Today, many observers feel that Saddam Hussein's goal in standing up to the United States, and to the U.S.-backed Israel, was to be a second Nasser. And although many Arabs united in the coalition against Iraq, Saddam Hussein did gain a widespread following among Palestinians and Jordanians for his anti-Western actions.

Arab Relations with the United States

The anti-American feeling among Arabs has also made it dangerous for Arab leaders to be seen as clients, or tools, of the United States. In 1981, after Egyptian president Anwar Sadat signed a U.S.-backed treaty with Israel, he was assassinated by a citizen of his own country. Present Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak has also faced criticism from people in his country for supporting the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq. Many Arab leaders have been hesitant to openly grant the U.S. any kind of permanent military access to their countries. Even the Saudis, who invited the U.S. to come and protect them after Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, have stated clearly that the U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia is not permanent.

On the other hand, U.S. intervention has been beneficial to some Arab states. The United States has come to the defense of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, substantial American aid has supported Egypt's sagging economy, and U.S. diplomacy helped the Egyptians to break a costly cycle of wars with Israel. The United States has long supplied many countries in the Middle East with weapons to defend themselves and, during the Iran-Iraq war, the U.S. protected Kuwaiti oil tankers from attack. These positive steps by the United States, however, have often been overshadowed by Arab distrust of Western intervention in the region.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

A major source of Arab-American differences lies in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel receives more U.S. aid than any other country—three billion dollars every year. U.S.-Israeli political and military ties are equally strong. The United States has air-lifted supplies and provided back-up support to Israel during its wars with its Arab neighbors. Thus, Arabs view U.S. and Israeli interests as the same.

But what exactly is the Arab-Israeli conflict? This conflict stems from competing claims to a piece of land—today's Israel. Until the mid-1800s, the land, then known as Palestine, was part of the Ottoman Empire and was inhabited by Arabs, most of whom were Muslims. As the century progressed, European Jews began immigrating to the area to escape the anti-Semitism they faced at home. Jews chose Palestine as a destination because of the religious importance of the region.

By World War I, Jews made up 12-14% of Palestine's population. The Arabs resented the Jewish settlers who were moving onto their lands. Meanwhile, the Jews, in order to protect themselves from anti-Semitism, wanted to establish a Jewish state and not one ruled by Muslim, or even secular, laws. As a result, the two groups had difficulty living side by side and often competed for jobs and resources.

After Turkey's defeat in World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was given to the British with the understanding that it would eventually receive independence. In the 1930s and during World War II, thousands of European Jews fled to the area to escape Nazi control. After the war was over, the newly formed United Nations was given the task of deciding the shape of an independent Palestine. The UN ultimately developed a plan to divide Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states, with Jerusalem under international administration. It was divided into many small Arab and Jewish provinces. In some of the "Jewish" areas there were more Arabs than Jews. Jewish leaders complained that these many small Jewish areas would be surrounded by hostile Arabs and difficult to defend. On the other hand, Arabs were outraged that the plan took what had long been Arab land and gave it to the recently-arrived Jewish settlers.

Jewish leaders feared that Palestine's Arab neighbors would try to capture the lands given to Jews by the UN plan. Thus, Jewish soldiers militarily overtook many Arab regions of Palestine. In May 1948, Jewish leaders declared an independent Jewish state—Israel. Israel's Arab neighbors were stunned by what they viewed as naked aggression against Palestinian Arabs and angry that the UN subsequently recognized Israel as a legitimate state. In protest, Arab states refused to recognize Israel and declared war on it. This war confirmed the Israelis' fears that their state was surrounded by hostile countries.

The Palestinians

Less than a year later, Jewish forces occupied 80% of Palestine and the fighting stopped. Hostility between Israel and its neighbors—Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan—did not cease, however. Arab-Israeli wars were fought in 1956, 1967, and 1973. One of the main sources of contention between the two sides was the plight of Palestinian Arabs who had lost their homes during the war. Israel claimed that these Palestinians had voluntarily fled and abandoned their homes. In addition, Israelis maintained, Israel was the only Jewish state in the Middle East—if the Palestinians wanted a homeland, they should go to a neighboring Arab state. The Arabs, on the other hand, maintained that the Palestinians had been forcibly removed by a war that Israel had started. Palestinians wanted their homes back as well as access to important Muslim sites in Jerusalem.

As the dispute continued, over 1.5 million refugees were left homeless and most were sent to UN camps with poor living conditions. The Palestinians were concentrated in three territories: the Golan Heights near Syria, the West Bank near Jordan, and the Gaza Strip near Egypt. Today these territories are occupied by Israeli forces that moved into the areas during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

The Palestinian refugee problem remains, as does the state of war between most Arab states and Israel. (After the 1973 war, Israel and Egypt—with the help of U.S. diplomats—reached a peace settlement.) Palestinians protest the impoverished conditions in the refugee camps and the Israeli military occupation of these areas. They decry the curfews, the closing of schools, the job discrimination, and the police brutality which Palestinians have experienced under Israeli occupation. Until 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has encouraged terrorism against Israel and its ally, the United States, to protest the Palestinians' situation. Since 1987, refugees living in the Israeli-occupied territories have held a series of uprisings, called the *intifadeh*, attacking Israeli soldiers with rocks and broken bottles.

The fundamentally conflicting demands of each side have made diplomacy difficult. Before the Gulf war began, Israel's policy was "no land for peace"—that is, Israel's conservative Likud government refused to give the Palestinians a homeland in exchange for an end to the *intifadeh*. The U.S. government backed Israel in this stance. The Palestinians, on the other hand, refused to give up their struggle until they

received guarantees of a homeland. The PLO was frustrated because it had recognized the state of Israel in 1988 and the Israelis had not responded with a willingness to negotiate.

The conflict between the two sides deepened when the Persian Gulf war began in January 1991. The Palestinians supported Saddam Hussein, who launched missiles at Israel. But Saddam Hussein's military loss left him unable to defend the Palestinian cause and the refugees remain under Israeli control. In addition, the Palestinians also lost important backing from moderate Arab states, like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, for opposing the anti-Iraq coalition. Although the Palestinians are now weakened, their lack of homeland is still a major problem in Middle Eastern politics. It will be difficult for Israel and the Arabs to work toward a peace settlement on the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, many agree that if there is to be lasting peace in the Middle East, Israel will need to address the Palestinian issue and the Arabs will need to accept their Jewish neighbor.

The U.S. has strongly supported Israel since its independence. Although the U.S. has had only extremely limited contact with the PLO, and cut ties to the organization in early 1990, it does have strong connections to many Arab states, including Egypt. Some observers feel that only the U.S. can put enough pressure on all sides to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Economic Disparity

Although most Arab nations oppose Israel and many Arabs harbor anti-American feelings, there are many great differences within the Arab world—especially economic ones.

Before the twentieth century, there was no widespread wealth in the region. With the discovery of oil in the Middle East, and the increasing demand for petroleum, however, some Middle Eastern states came into possession of resources that could make them rich. As British and French oil companies began to withdraw from the region, more and more oil revenue went directly to some Arab states. These countries, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Oman, in addition to the non-Gulf states Venezuela, Brunei, Ecuador, and Nigeria, joined together in an economic alliance called Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This organization has tried to control the price of oil exported to Western states. In the 1970s, because Western countries were so dependent on this oil and because world oil prices were high, OPEC wielded a great deal of power. During the 1980s, world oil prices fell and this influence was reduced.

On the other hand, many Arab states—such as Egypt, Syria, and Jordan—have had limited or no access to vast oil wealth. This has resulted in great economic differences within the Arab world. Kuwait's per capita GNP was $13,680 in 1988, while Egypt's was only $650. In addition, economic conditions in the poorer Arab states are tied to those in richer ones. Poor countries like Jordan are densely populated and have often sent workers to refineries in oil-rich countries. When the price of petroleum falls, as it did before the Gulf war, these guest workers are sent home, unemployed, to their home countries, which must support them. Rich states, on the other hand, are underpopulated and, when guest workers are sent away, can take care of their citizens well, even during hard times.

This economic disparity has caused widespread envy and anger among Arabs. Thus, many Arabs were sympathetic when Iraq, a relatively poor state with a per capita GNP of $1950, invaded wealthy Kuwait. Some people agree that if the postwar Middle East is to be a stable place, the grossly unequal distribution of wealth in the area will need to be addressed. Others would opt for at least keeping the resentments it creates in check.

The Middle Eastern Arms Race

Clearly, between the Arab-Israeli conflict and inter-Arab disputes, the Middle East is a tension-filled region. This tension has led to an arms race that has made the region even more unstable.

Before the war began, Iraq had the fourth

largest military in the world, with Israel, Syria, and Egypt not far behind. Even moderate Middle Eastern states like Saudi Arabia spend 20% of their country's gross national product on arms, as opposed to NATO countries, which spend only 3-4% of their GNP on weapons. In addition, there are chemical, biological, and nuclear arsenals in the Middle East that threaten to kill not only soldiers but civilians as well. Where did these weapons come from and how can they be eliminated?

There are essentially three arms races in the region. First, the Arabs and the Israelis have been trying to out-arm each other since 1948. And, although Israel is alone in a sea of Arab states, many Arab countries do not trust each other (for example Syria and Iraq) and thus believe they must each be able to defeat the well-equipped Israelis alone. Second, Iran and Iraq spent most of the 1980s arming themselves during their eight-year war. Finally, the oil-rich Gulf states like Saudi Arabia have been arming themselves against an attack from either Iran or Iraq.

In the past, this dangerous rush for weapons has been fueled by the U.S.-Soviet Cold War rivalry. Each superpower has tried to arm Middle Eastern states in hopes of gaining a Cold War ally. For example, the U.S. has given extensive support to the anti-communist Israelis for years. Superpower attempts at buying friendship, however, have not always worked. Although the Soviet Union gave millions of dollars worth of weapons and aid to Egypt, the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat expelled all Soviet military advisors in 1972 and turned to the United States. Similarly, the U.S.-armed Shah of Iran was overthrown, and U.S.-made weapons were used to hold American diplomats hostage. These failures, combined with the apparent end to the Cold War, may mean that the U.S. and Soviet governments may be less likely to try to arm Middle Eastern states.

On the other hand, many Middle Eastern countries are wealthy and can pay high prices for weapons. It will be very difficult to convince private arms merchants to stay away from these clients. The Soviet Union and China may prove to be even more difficult to control because arms sales are one of the most profitable sectors of their struggling economies. While private arms sales can be regulated by government intervention, it is difficult to regulate the sales of independent states.

Also, Israel is widely believed to possess nuclear weapons, and as a result, it will be almost impossible to convince Arab states that they can be secure without owning these weapons themselves. In fact, the entire web of hostility that is woven among Middle Eastern nations will make it very hard to reduce the number of weapons in the area. On the other hand, the turbulent nature of the region makes arms control all the more imperative.

Iraq's Future

Although the Middle Eastern arms race is dangerous, some observers believe that it is dangerous to allow any one state to become *too* weak. Some observers fear that if Iraq is left extremely battered, its neighbors may try to take over parts of it.

Iraq has had a long-standing dispute with its neighbor Syria and Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad. Both Syria and Iraq are officially governed by Baath parties. Baathism, which originated in Syria and first came to power in Iraq, combines socialism and Arab nationalism into a political ideology. Assad and Saddam Hussein each claim to be the true leader of the international Baathist party and have been bitter enemies for years. The extent of the dictators' competition was seen when Assad wholeheartedly joined the coalition against Hussein. If Iraq is left in a weakened state after the war, Assad may very well attempt to take over all or part of his Baathist rival's country.

Iran may also present a danger to post-war Iraq. Saddam Hussein, whose Baath party is officially a secular one, has been one of the leading opponents of Iran's fundamentalist government. This has to do, in part, with religious differences among Muslims. Much as Christians can be either Protestant or Catholic, Muslims can be Shiite or Sunni. The government in Iran is controlled by Shiite Muslims who form a majority of the population both there and in Iraq. In Iraq, however, Shiites have very little power because Saddam Hussein's government is

controlled by Sunnis. In fact, Shiites have been treated as second class citizens in Iraq. Thus, inspired by Iran's former leader, Shiite Ayatollah Khomeini, many Iraqi Shiites protested Saddam Hussein's government in the early 1980s. This threat to his regime, combined with a dispute over a common waterway, led to a bloody, eight-year war between Iran and Iraq. The two sides publically resolved their differences after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and Iran remained neutral during the Gulf war. However, Iran remains governed by fundamentalist Shiites and Iraq by a Baathist Sunni. Westerners and non-fundamentalist Arab leaders alike fear that, after the war, Iran may try to take advantage of Iraq's weakness to either take over part of the country or to propel a Shiite fundamentalist leader into power.

Iraq's neighbor Turkey will also be very interested in the outcome of the Gulf war. Both Iraq and Turkey have large Kurdish populations. In the past, Kurds have demanded an independent homeland called Kurdistan, which would encompass parts of Iraq and Turkey. Saddam Hussein responded to these calls for independence by using poison gas to kill Kurdish people and destroy their villages. Now that Saddam Hussein has been weakened, and the world made aware of his past atrocities toward the Kurds, the Kurds may be able to demand a new role in the post-war Iraq. If Iraqi Kurds were to receive special rights—for example, an independent state and control over some Iraqi oil—it could lead to massive unrest among Turkish Kurds. Some observers believe that in such a situation Turkey might try to take over Mosul, the Kurdish part of Iraq, in order to silence the Kurds.

Even if outside states do not intervene in Iraq, Shiites, Kurds, and other dissatisfied portions of the Iraqi population may rise up to protest Saddam Hussein's rule in the post-war chaos. In the days immediately following the cease-fire, returning soldiers caused uprisings in several Iraqi cities.

Future Western Involvement

One final question for Americans to consider is the extent of Western involvement in the region after the war. Should American troops remain in the region? Should the United States press for democratic reforms in the Middle East? All of these problems warrant attention in the post-war Gulf. With this background in mind, it is now up to you to discuss with your classmates the best possible course for the United States to take.

Published March 5, 1991.

This text is not copyrighted, and there are no limitations on the photocopying or other reproduction of this material, but appropriate credit would be appreciated.

AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

A Curriculum Unit on America's Choices

Follow-up Form

Please take a few moments to report on your use of this curriculum unit.

Date(s) used:

Course in which you used it:

Grade and level of students:

Did you use the lesson plans as they appear in the material or did you alter them? If so, how? What worked and what was less than perfect?

Were your students able to "try on" other perspectives?

How did the students' understanding change after using this material?

One of the goals of this unit is to encourage students to become more attentive to public policy issues. Do you have any evidence that this happened?

Other comments:

NAME_____ SCHOOL_____

ADDRESS_____CITY_____STATE____ZIP____

HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THIS MATERIAL?_____

Please return this form to: *Choices Education Project*
Center for Foreign Policy Development
Box 1948, Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

Choices Education Project
Center for Foreign Policy Development
Box 1948, Brown University
Providence, RI 02912